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Le mort du jeune aviateur anglais (The death of a young aviator),
Jacquot, Benoît,

University Art Museum Pacific Film Archive

Press Release

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Marguerite Duras

March 4, 11, 18, 25 and April 1.
at Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley

Pacific Film Archive is pleased to present a rich selection of films written and/or directed by Marguerite Duras, famed "New Novelist" and, in the words of critic Annette Michaelson "the most impressive and the largest talent at work in Europe's independent cinema."

Screenings will take place on Sundays, March 4 through April 1, at the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, located in Berkeley at 2625 Durant Avenue (one-half block west of College Avenue). Included are **Hiroshima, Mon Amour; India Song**; Jeanne Moreau in Peter Brook's **Moderato Cantabile**; Moreau and Gérard Depardieu in **Nathalie Granger; Such a Long Absence**, winner of the Grand Prize at Cannes in 1961; Depardieu in **The Truck**; Bulle Ogier and Dominique Sanda in **Le Navire Night**; and **The Death of a Young English Aviator** and **To Write**, two documentary interview films about Duras at age 80. General admission to these screenings is \$5.50 for one film, and \$7 for double bills. For further ticket or program information, please telephone (510) 642-1412.

At age eighty, Marguerite Duras is everywhere, and nowhere: Her name is synonymous with the New Novel in France and her novel *The Lover* was made into a glossy art-house film (which she reviles). Her own important canon of films and screenplays has attracted Europe's top actors—Jeanne Moreau, Delphine Seyrig, Alida Valli, Bulle Ogier, not to mention Depardieu and Belmondo. But her films are little available -- on screen or on videotape. Everywhere, and nowhere. Until now.

Our series brings together a rich sampling of films written and/or directed by Duras. Duras's cinema flows from her writings and back again. Characters, themes, and elements from the novels appear in the films and are referenced again in other books, plays, films. Duras's body of work offers an ongoing melodrama of time and memory and desire, usually centered on a woman in a moment of crisis, distress, and oblique understanding.

Duras promised/threatened to give us "less to see and more to think about, more to hear," and her films are fluid constructions-in-time incorporating offscreen dialogue, silence, and music. Music jogs the memory, memory incites desire, desire begets knowledge. But these works are by no means lacking in visual splendor; quite the

opposite. Duras on a scene from *India Song*: “‘Violet’...the color of the shot is the color of the word.”

Duras knows the “colonial sickness” of which *India Song* (and, earlier, *Hiroshima, mon amour*) speaks so eloquently. Born in French Indochina in 1914, she joined the French Resistance during World War II, encouraged draft resistance during the Algerian war, was a member of the Communist Party, and worked actively against the Vietnam war. Her narratives about the interior worlds of women are framed by menace just beyond the screen or page—the world outside the gate.

This series was organized by the Bureau du Cinéma, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, and presented with the assistance of the Consulate General of France, San Francisco. Our special thanks to Marie-Christine de Navacelle and Janine Deunf, Bureau du Cinéma, and Jean-Pierre Filiu, Cultural Attaché. Thanks also to Peter De Domenico who translated research materials from the French.

A complete series schedule follows.

Screening Schedule:

General admission: \$5.50 for one film, \$7.00 for double features

Saturday March 4

7:00 pm: **Nathalie Granger**, Marguerite Duras (France, 1972)

8:45 pm: **Moderato Cantabile**, Peter Brook (France, 1960)

Saturday March 11

7:00 pm: **India Song**, Marguerite Duras (France, 1975)

9:15 pm: **Such a Long Absence**, Henri Colpi (*Une Aussi Long Absence*, France, 1961)

Saturday March 18

7:00 pm: **The Truck**, Marguerite Duras (*Le Camion*, France, 1977)

8:35 pm: **Le Navire Night**, Marguerite Duras (France, 1979)

Saturday March 25

6:30 pm: **The Death of a Young English Aviator and To Write**, Benoît Jacquot (France, 1993)

8:15 pm: **Agatha, ou les lectures illimitées**, Marguerite Duras (France, 1981) and **L'Homme atlantique**, Marguerite Duras (*Atlantic Man*, France, 1981)

Saturday April 1

7:00 pm: **Les Enfants**, Marguerite Duras (*The Children*, France, 1984) , with short, **En Rachâchant**, (Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, France, 1982)

9:00 pm: **Hiroshima, mon amour**, Alain Resnais (France, 1959)

Program notes: Marguerite Duras:

Saturday March 4

Nathalie Granger 7:00
Marguerite Duras (France, 1972)

“Enter anywhere at random, anywhere is terrifying. Wherever it is one asks: How could one live here? How could one live?”—Duras

An oblique and electrifying look at family and society, *Nathalie Granger* chronicles an afternoon in the benumbed lives of two women (Jeanne Moreau and Lucia Bose) in their home on the outskirts of Paris. One is having trouble with her daughter, Nathalie, whose violent temper is making her unfit for public school; she's been “tagged” (for capture?). A sense of foreboding invades as they listen to radio reports of two teenagers who have murdered a child and are hunted in the surrounding forests. Enter Gérard Depardieu, traveling salesman, pathetic and somehow sinister, determined to sell the ladies of the house a washing machine they don't need. Perhaps he knows it all comes out in the wash. “*Nathalie Granger* is unusual in Duras's canon for its synchronized dialogue, its drollery, and its atmosphere of Pinteresque menace” (James Quandt, Cinematheque Ontario).

• Written by Duras. Photographed by Ghislain Cloquet. With Jeanne Moreau, Lucia Bose, Gérard Depardieu. (85 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)

Moderato Cantabile 8:45
Peter Brook (France, 1960)

“In film, you want to capture that thing that only happens once”: stage director Peter Brook knew the difference between theater and film, and his *Moderato Cantabile*, written by Duras based on her novel, is a classic of modernist cinema. Jeanne Moreau portrays a modern-day Emma Bovary/Jeanne Dielman who has perfected a barren life as wife and mother in a steeltown near Bordeaux—propriety practiced, like her son's piano sonata, to death. Suppressed is a fantasy life in which desire is mixed with death-wish. “She wants to live a life, anybody's life, even her own.” A chance witness to the murder of a woman in a cafe, she becomes obsessed with the incident and is drawn to a young man (Jean-Paul Belmondo) who shares her morbid fascination. Moreau won the Cannes prize. “Fantastically accurate, introspective performances” (Peter Baker, *MFB*).

• Written by Marguerite Duras, Gerard Jarlot, from a novel by Duras. Photographed by Armand Thirard. With Jeanne Moreau, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Didier Haudepin. (90 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, Scope, 35mm)

Saturday March 11

India Song 7:00
Marguerite Duras (France, 1975)

In *India Song*, her best known film, Duras effectively evokes colonial India of the thirties, contrasting the indolent life of the colonialists with the squalor and suffering that lie just outside their gates and consciousness—though her camera never ventures from the abodes of the wealthy, and the film was in fact shot in Paris. The story concerns a beautiful woman (Delphine Seyrig), the wife of a diplomat, suffering from what Duras has called “colonial sickness.” Despite numerous suitors and affairs, she lives in a private desolation which none can enter, haunted by the image of a beggar woman who personifies for her the cruelty of the colonial system. She detests people who “get used to” India. With its offscreen voices, a kind of distant dialogue counterpointed by image and music, *India Song* portrays what Richard Roud called an “India of the soul.”

• Written by Duras. Photographed by Bruno Nuytten. With Delphine Seyrig, Michel Lonsdale, Mathieu Carrière, Claude Mann. (120 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Such a Long Absence 9:15
Henri Colpi (France, 1961)

(Une Aussi Longue Absence). The title reflects the fate of this too-little-known film which won the Grand Prize at Cannes and the prestigious Prix Louis Delluc. Scripted by Duras, it was directed by Henri Colpi, the esteemed film editor best known for his work with Resnais (*Last Year at Marienbad*, *Hiroshima mon amour*). Colpi's forte as editor is in giving the matrix of memory and desire an emotional register through form. The setting here is a bleak Parisian suburb in August, when anyone who is anyone has left for *les vacances*; our story concerns those who stay. The proprietress (Alida Valli) of a working-class bar is stunned when a tramp (Georges Wilson) walks in who is the image of her husband, deported and presumably killed by the Germans sixteen years earlier. The kind, gentlemanly stranger has lost his memory, clearly damaged by the war himself; he is a tabula rasa onto which she paints her longing. "[The film] is notable for modesty, sincerity, genuine warmth. It is never impelled to seem larger than life; it is never felt to be less than human." (*Time*)

• Written by Marguerite Duras. Photographed by Marcel Weiss. With Alida Valli, Georges Wilson, Jacques Harden, Amedée. (95 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)

Saturday March 18

The Truck 7:00

Marguerite Duras (France, 1977)

(Le Camion). In the time-honored French tradition of *L'Age d'or* and *Rules of the Game*, Duras's *Le Camion* inspired fisticuffs between its supporters and detractors. In New York, Richard Roud hailed its "sheer nerve and physical beauty," Pauline Kael called it "tonic and funny...an ornery, glimmering achievement." Duras stars, along with Gérard Depardieu, a truck, and a landscape. The humans sit around a table and essentially conjure up the truck and the desolately beautiful landscape as she reads him a screenplay for a film ("It would have been a film, therefore it is a film") in which he plays a truck driver who picks up a female hitchhiker. The hitchhiker is a composite of Duras heroines and of Duras herself at the moment: "She is no longer bored...What I see in her is a pure joy of existing, without struggle for meaning" (Duras). "*The Truck* is a spiritual autobiography, [an] end-of-the-world road movie..." (Kael)

• Written by Duras. Photographed by Bruno Nuytten. With Duras, Gérard Depardieu. (80 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Le Navire Night 8:35

Marguerite Duras (France, 1979)

"For nights and nights they live with the telephone off the hook. Sleep against the receiver. Speaking or falling silent. Enjoying one another...It's a black orgasm. Without reciprocal touching. Nor face. Eyes closed. Your voice, alone... The text of voices says the eyes closed."—from the screenplay

A trio of top European actors—Bulle Ogier, Dominique Sanda, Mathieu Carrière—star in this film that shows here for the first time. Duras employs the ostensible-film-within-a-film format, used so cleverly in *Le Camion*, to tell of an extraordinary love affair conducted entirely by telephone. The voices of Duras and fellow filmmaker Benoît Jacquot provide the dialogue, narrate the movements of the actors. It's a bold directorial intervention, part Kabuki, part Sacha Guitry, pure Duras.

• Written by Duras. Photographed by Pierre Lhomme. With Bulle Ogier, Dominique Sanda, Mathieu Carrière. (94 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Saturday March 25

The Death of a Young English Aviator and To Write 6:30

(Benoît Jacquot, France, 1993)

Benoît Jacquot has made two films on Marguerite Duras and the writer's imagination. In *The Death of a Young English Aviator* (*Le mort du jeune aviateur anglais*, 36 mins), Duras emotionally recounts the story of an English flyer whose grave she discovered in a small village near Deauville. We do not know whether this is a true story or one of Duras's fictions; but between her words, spoken in Paris, and images of the

Normandy village, the film touches on the mystery of writing. In *To Write (Ecrire, 43 mins)* Duras talks about writing and solitude in the house where she lived alone for several years, and where she wrote *The Vice Consul* and *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*.

• Photographed by Caroline Champetier. (Total running time: c. 80 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Agatha, ou les lectures illimitées and L'Homme atlantique 8:15

Agatha

Marguerite Duras (France, 1981)

A crystalline expression of Duras's central themes—memory, desire, lost or forbidden love—*Agatha* stars Duras's companion Yann Andréa and Bulle Ogier as brother and sister. They arrange to rendezvous in the Hôtel des Roches Noires in the seaside village of Trouville (where Duras has a flat) because the hotel reminds them of the house they grew up in. There, engulfed by an expanse of sea and sky which turns into a confluence of memory, they wander through the château of endless windows and mirrors and empty rooms, finally confronting their incestuous desires. Among Duras's most radical experiments, *Agatha* not only separates image and text, but also concludes with a bravura, sustained use of black frame over which the denouement of the tale is narrated.—James Quandt

• Written by Duras. Photographed by Dominique Le Rigoleur, Jean-Paul Meurisse. With Bulle Ogier, Yann Andréa. (90 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

L'Homme atlantique

Marguerite Duras (France, 1981)

(*Atlantic Man*). Duras based the short feature *L'Homme atlantique* not on one of her written works but on her own film, *Agatha*, using outtakes from that film to push her image/sound experiment even further, and take the narrative with it. Gone from the screen is the sister, only the presence and voice of the brother (Yann Andréa) remain, “thereby suggesting, for the first time in her work, that ‘the gap between image and sound is now aligned with the fissure of sexual difference itself’” (Leslie Hill, quoted by J. Quandt). Duras said, “I think the darkness is in all my films, buried, beneath the image...I have only tried to reach the film's deep flow, once having got rid of the permanence of the image....This darkness I have called ‘the shadow within,’ the historical shadow of every individual...[a] forever brilliant magma which ‘makes’ the living person whatever he/she is, in whatever society, throughout all time.”

• Written by Duras. Images from *Agatha* photographed by Dominique Le Rigoleur, Jean-Paul Meurisse. With Yann Andréa. (41 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Saturday April 1

Les Enfants 7:00

Marguerite Duras (France, 1984)

Preceded by short:

En Rachâchant (Jean-Marie Straub, Danièle Huillet, France, 1982): Written by Duras based on her children's book, this film questions the importance of school, “because in school they teach me things I am ignorant of.” Jonathan Rosenbaum writes, “It is like a judicious encounter of Dennis the Menace with Straub, *Eraserhead* with Huillet.” Shot by the great Henri Alekan. (10 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 16mm. From New Yorker)

(*The Children*). A marvelous piece of absurdist cinema, *Les Enfants* concerns a seven-year-old boy, Ernesto, who is portrayed by a forty-year-old man (Axel Bougousslavsky). In his child's wisdom, Ernesto decides to quit school, since knowledge can count for nothing in a meaningless world. His lament concerning Creation (“Everything was there and it wasn't worth it”), his refusal to learn “what I do not know” have shades of Woody Allen's bespectacled youth who stops studying because “the universe is expanding.” But in Duras's universe a soulful mother (Tatiana Moukhine), although bemused, will never deny support to her precocious child, while the father (Daniel Gélin) is befuddled.

Within the effectively stark framework of Duras's work, rarely have the nuances of character been given such free play—nor the human condition been decried with such warm, sad humor.

• Co-directors: Jean-Marc Turine, Jean Mascolo. Written by Duras, based on her novel *Ab Ernesto!*. Photographed by Bruno Nuytten, *et al.* With Axel Bougousslavsky, André Dussollier, Daniel Gélin, Tatiana Moukhine. Narrated by Duras. (94 mins, In French with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Hiroshima, mon amour 9:00 *Alain Resnais (France, 1959)*

Hiroshima, mon amour fully realized cinema's poetic fusion: an original soundtrack weds music to text, image to the clipped poetry of dialogue. The film was an intensely personal creation by *two* "auteurs," screenwriter Marguerite Duras and director Resnais. Its seamless integration of past and present is a central theme in Resnais's work, while the tactile sensuality of the photographic images and the obsessions of its protagonists clearly mark the "tension between the claims of sensibility and social imperative" that Annette Michelson finds in Duras's films. In *Hiroshima*, a French actress working on an antiwar film meets a Japanese architect. They become lovers but their encounter revives memories of the war, revealing that the woman is her past, the man, his. For Duras, there is something irreducible about separateness which sex can transcend only fleetingly. Their struggle to come to terms with the idea that life goes on is reflected in images from a collective memory in newsreel footage of Hiroshima's hospital, war museum, and the rebuilt city—an important pacifist sub-theme, skillfully developed.

• Written by Marguerite Duras. Photographed by Sacha Vierny, Michio Takahashi. With Emmanuèle Riva, Eiji Okada, Bernard Fresson, Stella Dassas. (90 mins, In French with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm, PFA Collection, permission New Yorker)